



UNDP Ghana

# Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda in Ghana

The Status of Ghanaian youth in relation to the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

*By Melody Azinim – Peace & Governance Analyst and Cherry Kang, International UNV*



**Copyright ©UNDP 2023. All rights reserved.**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at [undp.org/](https://undp.org/) [undp.org/ghana](https://undp.org/ghana) or follow at [@UNDPGhana](https://twitter.com/UNDPGhana).

## List of abbreviations

<b>UNDP</b>	–	United Nations Development Programme
<b>NPC</b>	–	National Peace Council
<b>NCCE</b>	–	National Commission for Civic Education
<b>NYA</b>	–	National Youth Authority
<b>ECOWAS</b>	–	Economic Community of West African States
<b>UNSCR</b>	–	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>YPS</b>	–	Youth Peace and Security
<b>AU</b>	–	African Union
<b>NYP</b>	–	National Youth Policy



## Table of Contents

11. <b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
12. <b>YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN GHANA</b>	<b>6</b>
13. <b>YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY IN GHANA-YOUTH INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>7</b>
14. <b>CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>11</b>
15. <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>14</b>

# Introduction

The [Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda \(YPS\)](#) was first established by the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 (2015) to specifically address the global youth population in relation to peace and security. Through this resolution, the Security Council acknowledged for the first time "the important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" and outlined five different pillars for action: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnership, and Disengagement and Reintegration.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, two other resolutions were adopted to complement UNSCR 2250, which are UNSCR 2419 (2018) and UNSCR 2535 (2020). While acknowledging the disproportionate impact of conflict on youth, these resolutions recognized the key roles that meaningful inclusion and participation of youth can play in fostering and sustaining peace. Furthermore, they put forward relevant strategies that the international community can adopt to reinforce youth participation and partnerships in peacebuilding, as well as to prevent youth from being engaged in violent conflicts.

In line with the international efforts to promote the YPS agenda, there were also regional as well as sub-regional efforts taking place. At the regional level, the AU officially adopted the [Continental Framework for Youth, Peace, and Security](#) on August 21st, 2020. With its ten-year implementation plan, the Continental Framework seeks to 1) facilitate the acceptance and acknowledgment of efforts of young Africans

in peace and security 2) enhance partnerships and cooperation among target audiences and stakeholders on youth, peace, and security, and 3) promote the advancement of youth-led/centered strategic plans, initiatives, and programs by AUC, Regional Economic Communities, Member States, and other stakeholders, including the development and implementation of national action plans on youth, peace, and security that are aligned with national youth policies and development plans of the member nations.<sup>2</sup>

At the sub-regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has incorporated youth empowerment as the priority area in its [Conflict Prevention Framework \(ECPF\)](#). In the ECPF, ECOWAS clearly states that the objective is to develop self-reliant, responsible, and socially accountable role players as well as to discourage the behavior or actions that bring about violence and insecurity in communities and within the region by adding value and raising the capacities of young people<sup>3</sup>. As part of the effort, ECOWAS has been hosting the Annual Youth Forum for Peace and Security since 2018, as well as organizing a series of workshops aimed at reinforcing youth capacities on relevant issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> *UNSCR 2250: Introduction*. Youth4Peace Portal. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2022, from <https://youth4peace.info/UNSCR2250/Introduction>

<sup>2</sup> Continental Framework for Youth, Peace, and Security (2020).

<sup>3</sup> The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework

## YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN GHANA



The Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda holds particular importance in the Ghanaian context due to its large youth population and security issues. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Ghana's population age structure is transitioning into one dominated by young people (15-35<sup>4</sup> years), which accounts for 38.2% of the population.<sup>5</sup> This growing, vibrant population is characterized by high unemployment and underemployment rate. According to the available statistics, in 2021, the youth unemployment rate in Ghana recorded an all-time high of

<sup>4</sup> Ghana categories youth within this age bracket

<sup>5</sup> Ghana Statistical Services (2021). Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census

<sup>6</sup> IBID

<sup>7</sup> Dadzie, Christabel E.; Fumey, Mawuko; Namara, Suleiman. 2020. *Youth Employment*

13.4%, almost triple the 5.3% recorded in 2010.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the population is associated with low educational attainment level, as the *2015 Labour Force Report* estimates that 40% of the Ghanaian youth have no education and only 3.8% have attained a tertiary education qualification. Such trend is more pronounced in the rural areas, as more than half of the youth (57%) residing in rural areas have no education compared to the 26.3% of their urban counterparts.<sup>7</sup> The trend of high unemployment rate and low educational level, coupled with the emerging trend of

*Programs in Ghana : Options for Effective Policy Making and Implementation. International Development in Focus;. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank.*

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34349> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO

terrorism and violent extremism in the West African sub-region as well as Ghana's local grievances and innate vulnerabilities continue to pose a significant threat to national security. According to the Peace and Development Analysis published by UNDP Ghana (2022), youth unemployment and local vigilantism serve as one of the main drivers of conflict in Ghana. Specifically, the high rate of youth unemployment poses a significant threat to Ghana's peace and security, as the unemployed youth can be exploited to join violent extremist groups, piracy, galamsey (illegal mining), and engage in armed robbery or political violence in the absence of viable jobs. Furthermore, a positive correlation was discovered between youth, local forms of vigilantism, and a context-specific ingrained culture of violence and aggression.<sup>8</sup> Bearing these in mind, this paper aims to delve into the issue of the status of Ghanaian youth in relation to the YPS Agenda. Specifically, how the youth have been involved, the opportunities available for them to take up in the YPS agenda, possible challenges, and recommendations.

### I. Youth, Peace, and Security in Ghana- youth involvement

Youth engagement in Ghana's peace and security sphere can be classified into the work of civil society and government authorities. To begin with, the government of Ghana's commitment to the YPS Agenda is well addressed in its National Security Strategy (2020)<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> UNDP (2022). Peace and Development Analysis in Ghana: Policy Brief

Reassuring its commitment to the implementation of the UNSCR 2250, the government puts forward several policy measures to harness the potential of Ghanaian youth for socio-economic development as well as to enhance the contribution of youth to national peace and security. The measures outlined by the government include the following:

- a. Develop and integrate the National Youth Leadership Development Strategy (NYLDS) covering civic education, skills, and leadership training into the educational system
- b. Incorporate youth into the initiatives by the National Peace Council, House of Chiefs, CSOs, and Religious Organizations to prevent and resolve conflicts and disputes to build national unity and cohesion
- c. Initiate structures to strengthen youth participation in decision-making processes at the district, regional, and national levels of governance
- d. Adopt short and medium-term measures to provide relief to the youth regarding the challenges they face with lack of employment opportunities and poverty, as well as the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism

The National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of National Security (2020). National Security Strategy: A Secure and Prosperous Ghana, with Regional, Continental, and Global Reach and Influence

Terrorism in Ghana (2019) published by the Ministry of National Security also illustrates the importance of youth in peace and security sphere of Ghana. Outlining youth as a major stakeholder, the document sets forth various measures that different government departments, CSOs, religious and traditional leaders, and the media can take to prevent youth radicalization. Specifically, in the prevent pillar, the document emphasizes the necessity to halt the radicalization of the youth and vulnerable by making continuous efforts to tackle governance challenges<sup>10</sup> that build conditions for them to engage in violent extremism and terrorist activities.

As part of the efforts, the document proposes various measures for relevant stakeholders to take; including the development and implementation of specific and targeted de-radicalization programs, organizing a series of workshops, seminars, and community development programs to educate youth about the dangers related to extremism and how to counter them, and provision of skills and sports development for youth through schools, clubs, and community associations.

The National Peace Council (NPC) and the [Regional Peace Councils](#) have been essential government authorities in promoting youth engagement in peace and security. In recent years, they have undertaken conscious efforts to engage youth in conflict resolution as well as

peacebuilding processes and mechanisms. In 2019, NPC organized nationwide advocacy campaign workshops on the vigilantism and related offenses act adopted in August 2019. Targeting youth groups and disbanded political vigilante groups, the workshop advocated the eradication of violent political vigilantism to sustain peace prior to and post-elections.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, with the support of UNDP and other development partners, the NPC conducted a series of training surrounding the topics of prevention of violent extremism, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention in various conflict-prone communities, outlining youth as a primary target to be the advocates and ambassadors for peace.

The government of Ghana acknowledged the critical role youth could play in peacebuilding through its National Youth Policy (2010) and further highlighted through its latest 10-year [National Youth Policy \(2022-2032\)](#). Here, the NYA underscored the need to incorporate the participation of youth in national issues, including the resolution of conflict and peacebuilding, in every intervention at any level and any phase of the development process. Specifically, objective 4 of the National Youth Policy lays out the aim to strengthen the participation of youth in governance, community development, and decision-making as well as to heighten their sense of civic responsibility. For this objective,

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en/reports>

<sup>11</sup> Peace Council organizes two-day advocacy campaign workshop on Vigilantism Act in Tamale. (2020, July). *National Peace Council*.

Retrieved November 2022, from <https://www.peacecouncil.gov.gh/2020/07/24/peace-council-organizes-two-day-advocacy-campaign-workshop-on-vigilantism-act-in-tamale/>



NYA seeks to establish mechanisms that would make the youth an integral part of conflict resolution efforts to reinforce peace and security in the communities, such as integrating conflict prevention, dispute resolution, and peacebuilding into formal and non-formal education programs.<sup>12</sup> Prior to the 2020 general elections, the NYA together with the youth from diverse parts of the country developed a Youth Peace Charter<sup>13</sup> to promote peace before, during and after the elections. Again, the [youth parliament](#) has been a platform to enable more young people get involved in decision making including peacebuilding.

Apart from the government authorities, youth have engaged in the peace and security sphere of Ghana through various youth groups. In the area of conflict prevention, youth political activism and participation, especially at the community level, have undergone steady progress. Specifically, youth groups have contributed in areas such as voter mobilization, women's political participation, and prevention of electoral violence through various community activities and social media. Several CSOs such as ActionAid Ghana through its youth platform [Activista](#), WANEP's youth in peacebuilding, [Centre for Democratic Development](#) among others have programs that encourage and promote youth in peace building. Youth- led civil

society organisations such as the Youth Advocates Ghana (YAG) has been instrumental since 2017 to facilitate the active participation of youth in the implementation of the SDGs including peacebuilding through its African Youth SDGs Summit<sup>14</sup> For instance, Young Peace Brigades (YPB) has developed a vibrant community engagement strategy to reach out to and obtain the confidence of key stakeholders to peacefully resolve the dispute in the Obuasi area of the Ashanti region .<sup>15</sup>

UNDP in Ghana has through deliberate efforts ensured that youth are a key stakeholder in promoting peace and preventing violence over the years, which is further reflected in its new program document 2023-2027 to "support the creation of an enabling environment to promote the inclusion of women and youth in peacebuilding processes." This draws inspiration from UNDP's Renewed Governance and Peacebuilding Framework for Africa 2022-2025 which has a dedicated pillar on youth dubbed investing in Africa's youth with a goal to ensure that Africa's youth are fully included in all regional and national governance and peacebuilding initiatives.

---

<sup>12</sup> National Youth Authority (2022). National Youth Policy (2022-2032)  
[http://www.nya.gov.gh/nyadocuments/downloads/NYP\\_22.pdf](http://www.nya.gov.gh/nyadocuments/downloads/NYP_22.pdf)

<sup>13</sup>  
<https://nya.gov.gh/NYA%20Africa%20Youth%20Day%20Celebration>

<sup>14</sup>  
<https://youthadvocatesghana.org/index.php/african-youth-sdgs-summit>

<sup>15</sup> African Union (2020). A Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa

### **National Youth Dialogue (16 X 16 Program)**

Another great example of UNDP in Ghana's contribution to the YPS agenda is the 16 X 16 Ghana Program. Although initially launched with the primary objective of supporting youth participation in the review of SDG 16 in 2019, the UNDP 16 x 16 initiative became a new model for meaningful youth engagement in the implementation, monitoring, and review of SDG 16 and other SDGs in general. Based on the lessons learned and gains of the global initiative, UNDP Ghana has endorsed and localized the model into the Ghanaian context, aiming to foster an enabling and safe space that promotes a partnership between youth leaders and duty bearers to share lessons, identify local opportunities and risks, and co-design the strategies to support and advance youth-led actions for peace, justice, and inclusive society. In collaboration with Youth Advocates Ghana, UNDP in Ghana designed the two-day SDG 16 National Youth Dialogue initiative to identify and engage youth leaders and activists in conversation to heighten the youth-led actions and engagements in the implementation, monitoring, and reviewing the progress of SDG 16 in Ghana. Youth participants who attended the dialogue consisted of youth leaders, advocates, and young people across the 16 regions of Ghana. Deliberate efforts were made to ensure adequate participation of youth in rural, conflict-prone, underserved areas in Ghana. In total, approximately 671 participants (356 on the first day and 289 on the second day) participated in the program either virtually or in person.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

### **I. CHALLENGES**

Despite the past involvements, there are still several challenges hindering the advancement of youth engagement in Ghana's peace and security sphere. One of the key issues is that the potential of youth in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is yet to be fully exploited. Most importantly, Ghana has still not adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) to address UNSCR 2250. Although GHANAP 2, the latest NAP adopted in 2020 on UNSCR 1325, addresses women, particularly young women's engagement in the peace and security landscape, the absence of NAP targeting youth involvement remains a challenge.

Furthermore, the National Peace Council Act 818 (2011) fails to provide for youth representation in its councils and engagement in peacebuilding efforts. Although there has been growing

recognition and attempts to incorporate youth in peace and security, without the adoption and establishment of formal legislation, the advancement of youth involvement in peace and security would face significant roadblocks and might remain ad hoc.

Furthermore, the lack of involvement and representation of youth at the decision-making level remains a great challenge. Facing significant challenges such as age discrimination, lack of finance and logistics to implement youth-led actions, youth in Ghana also continue to experience limited participation and representation in leadership and decision-making processes. At the parliamentary level, the proportion of Members of Parliament who could be classified as youth when they entered parliament was only 4.75% (2016) and

4.4% (2020) of the total 275 legislatures<sup>16</sup>. The recent afrobarometer survey data also displays a lack of political and civic engagement by the youth compared to their elderly counterparts. Although nearly two-thirds (64%) of youth indicated that they "occasionally" or "frequently" discuss political matters with family and friends, they were less likely to have attended a community meeting (43%), gather with others to raise an issue (39%), or contact the political leaders to discuss or share their views on crucial political issues during the previous 12 months.<sup>17</sup> Considering that more than a third (38.2%) of the population is classified as youth, the significant under-representation and disengagement of youth needs to be addressed to ensure that the policies adequately reflect their voices.

Further exacerbating the issue, there is a significant disparity existing within youth engagement. Government interventions or youth engagement activities often focus on urban youth, marginalizing rural youth from the process. As a result, youth most prone to the threat of violent extremism and security threats, including the ones in border communities or local vigilante groups, often find themselves left out of the discussions in the peace and security sphere.

---

<sup>16</sup> UNDP (2021), Governance and Politics in Ghana: Policy Brief

<sup>17</sup> Sanny, J.A.N (2020), International Youth Day: Unemployment and education are Ghanaian youth's most important problems., Afrobarometer Dispatch No.382

<sup>18</sup> <https://citifmonline.com/2017/10/18-incidents-of-vigilante-violence-recorded-since-npps-victory/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.modernghana.com/news/213479/ndc-chairman-pays-irate-ashaiman-ndc-youth.html>

Another issue lies in the involvement of youth in electoral violence. According to Electoral Violence and Political Vigilantism in Ghana report (2020), respondents indicated that youth, especially the unemployed, are utilized by political parties and politicians to inflict violence with the promise of job provision. These youth wings in most parties engage in aggressive political activities, including vandalization of public property, seizing and controlling public goods, militias/vigilantism, and electoral violence. Especially during election season, they often engage in electoral malpractices, including the removal, and defacing of posters, and snatching of ballot boxes<sup>1819</sup>. The most recent example of the involvement of youth in electoral violence is the violent disturbances that occurred at the NDC's National Youth and Women's Organizer Elections held at Cape Coast on December 10th, 2022, which led to the destruction of property and the injury of 3 individuals.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the youth also involve in post-election violence, such as the seizure of public facilities or kicking out public officials that they perceive as belonging to the opposition party from public offices.<sup>21</sup> For instance, on January 2017, the NPP-affiliated youth supporters in Tamale forcefully seized the public

<sup>20</sup> Arhinful, E. (2022, December 12). 16 wanted over violent clashes at NDC's National Youth Organizer and Women's Organizer elections. *Myjoy Online*. Retrieved January 23, 2023, from <https://www.myjoyonline.com/16-wanted-over-violent-clashes-at-ndcs-national-youth-organiser-and-womens-organiser-elections/>.

<sup>21</sup> Dumenu, M. Y., & Adzraku, M. E. (2020). Electoral Violence and Political Vigilantism in Ghana: Evidence from Selected Hotspots.

institutions and threatened the public officers to vacate their offices following the swearing in of the incumbent president<sup>22</sup>. Such incidents hinder the recognition of youth as important agents of peace, impeding the incorporation of youth into traditional and formal peace architecture.

Lastly, another challenge to the role that youth play is the limited research and data from various parts of Ghana in peace building and conflict prevention. This affects the ability to thoughtfully plan to address the issues in a holistic manner.

---

## II. Opportunities

Several opportunities are also available to improve Ghana's progress toward attaining the YPS agenda.

- The adoption and effective implementation of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (GHANAP II) provides a valuable opportunity for young women to engage in the peace and security architecture of the country. Formally adopted in March 2020, GHANAP II aims to enhance the participation and representation of women in the decision-making and peace procedures at all levels through measures including capacity building and strengthening the advocacy for the implementation of legislation and policies. This will present an invaluable opportunity to extend the participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution from the informal to the formal sphere and realize the immense potential existing among the vibrant female youth population.
- The incorporation of youth in conflict resolution and peacebuilding as one of the key strategies to attain its objective in the latest National Youth Policy (2022-2032). Compared to the previous policy, the latest National Youth Policy acknowledges and places greater emphasis on the crucial role that youth can play in reinforcing the peace and security of the country. When implemented, the policy would present valuable

---

<sup>22</sup> Myjoyonline (2017, January 9). Rampaging Tamale NPP youth invade, lock up NHIS, YEA, NADMO offices. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2017/janu>

ary-9th/rampaging-tamale-npp-youth-invade-lock-up-nhis-yeandmo-offices (Accessed: January 23, 2023).

opportunities for young people to raise their voices in peace and security architecture.

- Various Civil Society Organizations and youth groups working on the YPS agenda. There are various civil society organizations and youth groups in Ghana working on the area of youth, peace, and security through activities including peace education

and peer mediation, youth empowerment programs, dialogues, and initiatives. Such efforts in the civil society sphere present valuable opportunity for youth to foster youth-led and youth-based peace networks, as well as engage in alternative livelihood opportunities that prevents them from the threats of radicalization towards violent extremism.

## **I. RECOMMENDATION**

In the order to improve youth inclusion in peace and advance the youth peace and security agenda, we will recommend the following:

### **1. Development and adoption of specific National Action Plan (NAP) to address UNSCR 2250:**

- The absence of a national action plan (NAP) to incorporate UNSCR 2250 remains one of the biggest challenges. As such, for Ghana to fully engage youth to contribute to promoting peace and security, the development and adoption of NAP explicitly focusing on UNSCR 2250 appear necessary.
- Furthermore, the implementation of GHANAP II should further highlight the role of young women and actively engage them in peace and security processes.

### **2. Establish a mechanism to ensure an efficient engagement of stakeholders:**

As various civil society organizations and youth groups have been working in the field of youth, peace, and security, ensuring their effective engagement and collaboration would be crucial. Thus, the government through the NYA, NPC, NCCE and local assemblies should devise measures to partner and engage with various civil society actors, including organizing workshops, dialogues, and consortiums as well as establishing a working group on youth, peace, and security. Support the National Peace Council to advocate for the nomination and appointment of young people as part of its regional/national boards

### **3. Employ various measures to broaden the target:**

As government interventions or youth engagement activities often focus on urban youth, youth most prone to the threat of conflict and security threats often find themselves left out of the discussions in the peace and security sphere. Thus, it is necessary to set out strategic plans to ensure adequate engagement of conflict-prone and underserved youth in the peace and security architecture of Ghana. Decentralization of youth events to the regional or district levels to discuss context-specific issues and the expansion of the usage of local language during the discussions should be considered to assure equal and fair representation of youth.

### **4. Empowerment and Advocacy activities:**

- Building the capacity of youth and their networks in peacebuilding is critical to providing them with the needed knowledge and skills to take the right actions for social cohesion.
- Organize a series of advocacy activities to raise public awareness of the critical role that youth can play in maintaining and reinforcing national peace and security.
- Empower youth networks and their associations with finances to enable them implement local interventions.
- Furthermore, arrange advocacy activities to increase awareness of the YPS agenda, such as holding campaigns at schools or incorporating it as part of the official education.



UN House, No 27 Ring Road East  
P.O.Box GP 1423, Accra

GPS Address: GL-063-9361  
Tel: +233 302 215 670

Email: [registry.gh@undp.org](mailto:registry.gh@undp.org)  
Website: [www.undp.org/ghana](http://www.undp.org/ghana)

Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn/YouTube:  
@UNDPGhana